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U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Partnership: A Track-Two Dialogue for Long-Term Security Cooperation and Stability

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Conference Report

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U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Partnership: A Track-Two Dialogue for Long-Term Security Cooperation and Stability

Project organized by the Center for Contemporary Conflict, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School and the Spearhead Research Institute with support from the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency and the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration

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by Dr. Peter Lavoy and Ms. Rebekah Dietz

Executive Summary

On 21 September 2007, the Center for Contemporary Conflict (CCC), in collaboration with the Spearhead Research Institute in Lahore, convened the second in a series of track-two dialogues on U.S.-Pakistan strategic relations. The CCC collaborated with Pakistan's National Defense University to host the first event in Islamabad in February 2007 (see the conference report at <http://www.nps.edu/academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2007/May/lavoyMay07.pdf>). This session brought together top Pakistani and U.S. experts to examine the future of bilateral relations. Key points included:

- **U.S.-Pakistan Relations: Maintaining Alliance and Trust.** The trust deficit between the United States and Pakistan stems from mutual misperceptions of each side's motivations and intentions and a shortage of person-to-person contact between the two countries. Participants suggested ways to improve trust in the bilateral relationship: improved public diplomacy; the use of media; co-publication arrangements; op-eds; educational exchanges; etc.
- **Shifting Demographic Challenges.** More than half of the people in Pakistan are children or youth, which a Pakistani panelist defined as anyone under age 25. These often anti-American youths are a potential source of recruitment by extremists unless moderate forces are able to attract them. While the U.S. policy remains focused on counterterrorism, it is important to address the youth bulge in the long-term to prevent and counter the spread of extremism. Initiatives to improve Pakistan's education system must be a top priority.
- **Nuclear Management and Security.** Pakistan is focused on developing nuclear energy for regional security and to meet its future energy requirements. The United States is more concerned about nuclear proliferation and the security of nuclear materials. Pakistan is handicapped by A.Q. Khan's legacy and a history of friction with Washington over nuclear issues, despite making considerable improvement in command and control. Both sides must work to overcome misperceptions and narrow the differences on nuclear issues.
- **Future U.S.-Pakistan Track Two Cooperation.** The participants affirmed the five areas for future study identified in the Islamabad seminar: (1) the bilateral trust deficit, (2) India-Pakistan conflict resolution, (3) shifting demographics in Pakistan, (4) energy security, and (5) nuclear strategic stability and security. The Washington seminar added three new areas for future discussion: (1) expanded counterterrorism and counterinsurgency cooperation, (2) improvement of non-security aid programs, and (3) public diplomacy by both countries.

Opening Remarks

U.S. opening comments stressed the need for a free and frank exchange of ideas to discuss practical problems that confront the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. The speaker identified this relationship as one of the most important relationships of the United States in the post-9/11 era, and recognized the trust deficit as the biggest problem in bilateral relations. The goals of this workshop were (1) to come up with practical ideas for both governments to take up at the track-one level, and to identify other topics, issues, and areas to examine in future track-two activities.

Pakistani opening remarks described the U.S.-Pakistan relationship as very important to Pakistan. The speaker noted that bilateral relations are under great strain today, but called this relationship resilient. He agreed that both sides must work to dispel the trust deficit, and stressed the implications of shifting demographics in Pakistan. He emphasized that the United States and Pakistan must continue their unprecedented cooperation in nuclear management and security, and also seek to further strengthen relations on a broad range of other issues.



Mr. Michael Wheeler (left), Dr. Peter Lavoy, and Gen. (ret.) Jehangir Karamat

Panel One: U.S.-Pakistan Relations: Maintaining Alliance and Trust

U.S. public diplomacy has mostly failed in Pakistan. The U.S. embassy in Islamabad has been described as a "fortress" from which embassy personnel rarely venture into the public. And Pakistanis are facing visa difficulties coming to the United States. The U.S. panel chair posed the question: how does one instill trust in the bilateral relationship? He noted that the United States would benefit if Pakistanis had greater confidence in U.S. motives and vice versa, and emphasized that trust must happen at the societal level—not just within

governments.

A Pakistani discussant identified three recent irritants in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship: (1) HR-1, which Pakistanis see as legislation treating Pakistan as an occupied country; (2) statements by key American political figures (e.g., Barack Obama) that imply dictation to Pakistan; and (3) the fact that State Department officials lectured in Pakistan about how Pakistani political parties ought to behave. The discussant then explained the perceptions in both countries that contribute to the trust deficit. Americans see Pakistan as: a hub of terrorism; having a two-prong policy: one for the United States and another for militants; not doing enough to contain militancy; an unreliable ally; and Musharraf is perceived as the only one who can "deliver the goods." Pakistanis criticize the United States for: looking for a scapegoat for failures in Afghanistan and Iraq; violating Pakistani sovereignty and territorial integrity; expecting Pakistanis to kill its own citizens for U.S. interests; treating the war on terror as a Pakistani war; forcing democracy as the only way to manage extremism; having imperial designs; and as an unreliable ally.

The Pakistani speaker suggested four possible futures: (1) the United States continues its present policy and Pakistan is sucked into fierce tribal and civil war, leading to tensions in the military and between civilians and the army; (2) the new U.S. president treats al Qaida and the Taliban separately and causes a positive temporary relief of tensions; (3) the Pakistani government enters into an agreement with the tribes in FATA, and the United States provides aid for development, resulting in less hostility between the United States and the tribes; and (4) Pakistan withdraws from active cooperation and the United States takes the war into Pakistani territory.

The U.S. discussant began with four premises for moving the U.S.-Pak relationship forward: (1) the status quo is not working, and each side thinks it is giving up too much for the relationship; (2) there is a need to move beyond a transactional relationship and toward a more generally cooperative one; (3) real transaction costs will need to be paid for a major transformation of the relationship; and (4) the transformation of the relationship will have enormous benefits. The speaker made several suggestions for the United States to show good faith to Pakistan and improve trust in the relationship. These suggestions include tripling non-security aid to \$1.5 billion annually for at least one decade, which he said must visibly go to the people; conditioning security aid on performance; giving Pakistan a democracy dividend; and reaching out to the Pakistani people through public diplomacy.

A roundtable discussion followed the panelists' presentations. A U.S. participant posed the question: how do you get beyond the negative perceptions in Congress to achieve the proposed aid package? The American panelist responded that Pakistan could be framed as a bridge between the Muslim world and the West. A Pakistani participant noted that conditionality for performance would be a real problem for Pakistan, and an American participant clarified that the United States would need to distinguish between measures of performance and measures of effectiveness with respect to conditionality.

A U.S. participant agreed with the panelists that the big challenge in U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations is public diplomacy. He suggested that, while there is significant operational cooperation between the two countries, it is discreet, and even the enormous earthquake relief was not visible enough to everyone. He commented that U.S. public affairs offices in Pakistan are ineffectual, as resources have been slashed and travel disapproved; furthermore, there are only a handful of Pakistanis in the United States—not enough to facilitate understanding between the two countries.

A Pakistani participant remarked that many misperceptions about Pakistan in the United States originated in and were shaped by India, and pointed to the role of the India caucus in the U.S. Congress. This participant noted that Indian lobbies have been far more successful at creating an understanding of Indian interests and commonalities with U.S. interests than Pakistani lobbies. He explained that the track-two process is a good opportunity to produce a more sophisticated picture of what Pakistan really is.



Dr. Timothy Hoyt (left) and Ms. Polly Nayak

Panel Two: Shifting Demographic Challenges

The Pakistani presenter began by breaking down the youth bulge in Pakistan: 36 million youth between the ages of 15 and 24, and 69 million children below age 15, most of whom are men. He warned that the youth bulge will grow beyond 2025, as fertility is still as high as 4.1 per female, and explained that this is problematic because of the tendency of youth to be drawn to extremism. He pointed out that the United States has exacerbated these tendencies, and, as a result, the youth have grown up in an environment that is inherently anti-American.

Three distinct social groups have emerged in this generation: (1) religious radicals, which mostly emanate from the madrassas; (2) the lower-middle class, or "Urdu medium culture;" and (3) the elite, also referred to as the "English medium culture." The first social group is very conservative and most likely to be extremist; the second group, which makes up the majority of Pakistanis, is conservative but more in the middle; the third group is relatively pro-Western, but constitutes only a small minority of Pakistan.

The Pakistani speaker looked at two main issues with respect to the youth bulge: education and extremism. He also briefly touched on migration, the India competition, and underemployment. On education, he discussed the expectation-reality disconnect, as education has been increasingly stratified along socioeconomic lines. Twenty to thirty years ago, there were fewer fissures between social groups; now, there are growing problems with the uneven distribution of wealth. The elite are able to attend private schools, but the quality of public education is poor. The speaker recommended that Pakistan increase the number of rural private schools and seek U.S. aid to develop model schools.

On extremism, the speaker pointed out that Pakistan is problematic because it has a deliberate policy to engage extremists through Islamic discourse. Extremism is used as a tool against India, and the religious right is used to keep a check on liberal political parties. Islamists are spreading influence and significance in Pakistan, and the appeal of extremist parties is growing in comparison to moderate parties, which have not delivered—particularly to the youth. The speaker emphasized the need to engage and excite the youth to prevent the spread of extremism.

The U.S. panelist agreed that the United States should worry about demographics in Pakistan. He pointed out that seventy percent of Pakistan's population is under twenty, and concurred that this places a heavy burden on the education system. He estimated that because of its growing youth population, Pakistan will need to add approximately two million new jobs per year. The lens through which Washington sees Pakistan is counterterrorism, but the youth bulge can and should be seen through this lens. He asked: who will be able to mobilize these youth cohorts well? This is the main concern, as war is more likely to occur when there is a youth bulge in a country.

The speaker concluded by summing up what he perceives to be the main challenges in the bilateral relationship with respect to shifting demographic concerns: America does not know

Pakistan well and vice versa; military operations on the border are deeply unpopular within Pakistan; most Pakistanis equate America's war on terror with a war on Islam; the availability of liberal partnership is limited in Pakistan; and we may underestimate the extent to which the youth bulge is important.

One participant argued that there must be a complete revamping of the educational system in Pakistan. He commented that U.S. efforts to instill secular education in Pakistan could backfire because of strong religious sentiments in the country. Another Pakistani commented that the youth bulge is most prevalent in areas that are represented by local ethnic parties. He remarked that development in FATA must empower local people and identities. Participants discussed the use of technology to reach out to the youth, and one commented that it has democratized access to information in Pakistan. The Pakistani presenter suggested the United States and Pakistan address the youth bulge by targeting poverty, using linkage and conditionality with aid, and by providing technical assistance when needed.

Panel Three: Nuclear Management and Security

Pakistan is focused on its nuclear weapons and energy requirements in the future and on moving beyond nonproliferation concerns. Washington, however, is more concerned about proliferation prospects and Pakistan's nuclear management and security. Pakistan wears the scarlet letter of A.Q. Khan, which negatively impacts perceptions about its efforts to improve nuclear command and control and security upgrades in nuclear management. This effort has made little impression on the United States, which has led many Pakistanis to believe that their efforts always will be insufficient. Participants discussed the challenge of establishing balance between secrecy and transparency. Pakistan has security concerns and nuclear weapons programs are always shrouded in secrecy by all nuclear powers. Transparency always will be limited. Further, ambiguity in nuclear force posture and doctrine is a function of deterrence. Participants generally agreed that nuclear ambiguity can be both stabilizing and destabilizing. On the issues of nuclear security, the U.S. participants insisted on greater transparency by Pakistan. Pakistani participants questioned what exactly are the international standards of security and safeguards, and how and whether they can be verified if the program is secret.

The Pakistani presenter began the third panel by stating several concerns that had been expressed throughout the day: (1) the legacy of A.Q. Khan; (2) prospects for the return of rogue generals and scientists; (3) Islamic takeover; and (4) President Musharraf's succession. He conducted a brief overview of nuclear management in Pakistan post-1998, which included command and control arrangements; the development of nuclear doctrine; security arrangements; export control law, guidelines and enforcement; Pakistan's Nuclear Regulatory Authority; the consolidated control of NESCOM; financial accounting; transportation security; and U.S.-Pakistani bilateral cooperation, which is non-intrusive and has been kept private. The presenter mentioned the U.S.-India nuclear agreement, and affirmed that Pakistan will do its best to maintain its credible minimum deterrence against India.

The American presenter began by identifying the key U.S. objectives for Pakistan's nuclear management and security: (1) to secure Pakistan's fissile material and weapons; (2) regional peace and stability, which includes minimizing the threat of nuclear competition; and (3) to limit the costs of nuclear weapons proliferation and to translate these savings into social and economic sectors. He identified three main areas of concern: nuclear transparency, regional engagement, and strategic stability.

For nuclear transparency, the speaker mentioned how, during the Cold War, trust reassured governments and the public that they were safe. Today, Pakistan wants legitimacy and international acceptance, but it has two strikes against it: A.Q. Khan and the war on terrorism. He noted that Pakistan has done more on nuclear transparency than India, but said it needs to provide more information on nuclear forces, including their management. He suggested regular White Papers, posture statements, and international tours of sensitive facilities to help achieve this. On regional engagement, the speaker commented that there has been little personal interaction between Indian and Pakistani nuclear planners, and suggested the United States could play a more significant role in stimulating regional dialogues and restraint. On strategic stability, he pointed out that both Pakistan and India are pursuing a minimal nuclear deterrent, and emphasized the need to avoid an open-ended arms competition between them. The speaker suggested that Pakistan pursue structured force limitation negotiations with India in order to reduce the number of Indian forces and to save money.

The roundtable discussion after the presentations began with a question by the panel chair: how much transparency does Pakistan have to produce to be trusted? A Pakistani participant offered that mistrust is so high between the United States and Pakistan that no level of transparency is acceptable. He further stated that the nuclear issue is no longer a technical issue in Pakistan, but rather it is intertwined with politics and the extremist tag. Another Pakistani offered that, for a smaller force, ambiguity is necessary for deterrence. He remarked that India is not ready for bilateral agreements, and that now India prefers to coordinate directly with the United States, which is more sympathetic and positive than a multilateral forum.

A U.S. participant added that transparency could have a negative impact on bilateral relations. He shared a personal experience about an official in India who recently complained about Pakistan's fissile material and missile production, remarking that Pakistan is moving toward a counterforce capability, which could become very destabilizing. This participant asserted that the greater concern is the growing pressure that Pakistan (and perhaps India) feels a need to upgrade its operational readiness. He categorized the 1990s as the era of nonproliferation, the 2000s as the era of terrorism (i.e. safety and security), and asked if the 2010s would be the era of nuclear use. The speaker emphasized the fear of an arms race between India and Pakistan, and stressed that the United States must prepare to deal with emerging strategic competition.



Mr. Moeed Yusuf (left), Dr. Syed Farooq Hasnat, and Dr. Neil Joeck

Next Steps

At the conclusion of the conference, all panelists and participants made suggestions for the future of U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations. One participant suggested that the United States put a nuclear strategic stability process on the agenda as both U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations and U.S.-India bilateral negotiations. Another suggested that, given the political changes that will occur in all three countries, it is best to use track-two to develop new ways to talk about sensitive issues. This participant suggested an educational exchange among American and Pakistani professors. Another suggested a continuation of the track-two dialogue, in part to wait for track-one to resume, and in part to extend track-two to the rising generation to address the youth bulge. Particularly on nuclear security, there might be generational issues worth addressing.

Another participant suggested that the United States do more to promote regional aid and economic integration as a long-term method of dealing with youth bulge issues. A Pakistani participant commented that it would be useful to involve a few leading private business professionals in the next track two dialogue as well as several leading talk show hosts. This participant also suggested a co-publication arrangement among think tanks in Washington and Pakistan, and that participants of this conference write op-eds before the next session. A U.S. participant suggested that the United States ought to promote more track-three, or people-to-people dialogues, with Pakistan, targeting opinion-shapers and youth. Several participants stressed the importance of reinvigorating U.S. public affairs programs. A Pakistani participant suggested that more bodies be added to this track-two process to influence the skeptics and to create space for the Pakistanis to get their message out across the United States.

The participants identified five main areas for future deliberation in the next iteration of the U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Partnership dialogues. These areas were: (1) the trust deficit: how to undo the irritants; (2) enhancing military-to-military cooperation and identifying capacity-building for counterterrorism; (3) shifting demographics in Pakistan; (4) nuclear management and security; and (5) energy security, which touches on nuclear security issues, the socio-economic absorption of the youth bulge, and regional geopolitics, as an instrument peace and confidence-building measures through “pipeline diplomacy” in the area.

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